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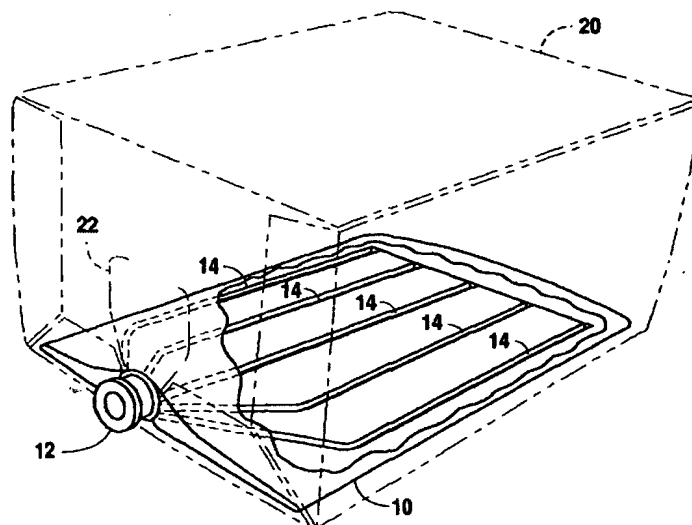
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- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): DR PEP-
PER/SEVEN UP, INC. [US/US]; 5301 Legacy Drive,
Plano, TX 75024 (US). For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.
- (72) Inventor; and
- (75) Inventor/Applicant (for US only): PROVENZA, Frank,
L. [US/US]; 8 Santa Anita Circle, Wylie, TX 75098 (US).

(54) Title: COLLAPSIBLE CONTAINER FOR LIQUIDS



(57) Abstract: This invention is directed to an improved collapsible bag (10) having a spout (12) and one or more grooves (14) on the interior surface of a wall of the bag (10). The grooves (14), which are integral to a wall of the bag (10) rather than on a separate evacuation strip, are in liquid communication with the spout (12) and are sized such that the opposing wall of the bag (10) is not completely forced into the grooves (14) under the suction of conventional pumps which are used to withdraw the liquid from the bag (10). Thus, the grooves enable substantially complete withdrawal of the liquid from the bag (10) without the use of an evacuation strip. Additionally, the present invention may be used in any orientation and does not require a slanted rack.

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TITLE: COLLAPSIBLE CONTAINER FOR LIQUIDS**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application claims priority from U.S. Provisional
5 Application Serial No. 60/196,838 filed on April 13, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**1. Field of the Invention**

This invention relates generally to an apparatus for
containing and dispensing liquid. More specifically, this invention
10 is directed to a collapsible container for use in a bag-in-box
apparatus.

2. Description of the Related Art

In the field of post-mix beverage systems, an apparatus
commonly known as a bag-in-box package is used to store and
15 dispense beverages such as soft drinks. Typically, such bag-in-box
packages comprise a collapsible bag or bladder disposed within a
cardboard box. The bag has a spout for filling the bag with liquid,
and the spout protrudes through a wall of the box for dispensing the
liquid from the bag, usually by connection to a pump. One of the
20 problems associated with such bag-in-box packages is that the bag
collapses upon itself as the liquid is withdrawn, which tends to
create pockets of liquid that are isolated from the spout and cannot
be withdrawn from the bag. Thus, the residual portion of liquid
remaining in the bag is wasted.

25 One possible solution to the foregoing problem is to place an
evacuation strip inside the bag as shown, for example, in U.S. Pat.
No. 5,749,493 to Boone et al. The bag of the '493 patent contains an
elongated, narrow, flexible evacuation strip comprising a plurality of
upstanding ribs. The evacuation strip is attached to the inner
30 surface of one of the bag walls. A spout is disposed through a wall of

the bag, and the evacuation strip is in liquid communication with the spout. As the bag collapses upon withdrawal of the liquid through the spout, the ribs of the evacuation strip prevent the walls of the bag from isolating pockets of liquid from the spout. The
5 evacuation strip thus enables substantially complete withdrawal of the liquid from the bag. However, the evacuation strip adds an extra complication to the bag manufacturing process.

Another possible attempt to solve the problem of incomplete withdrawal of the liquid from such bag-in-box packages is to place
10 the packages on slanted racks. By orienting the package such that the spout is at the lowest possible point, gravity will assist in forcing the liquid toward the spout. However, the need for a special slanted rack is a disadvantage to such an arrangement. Another disadvantage is the required orientation of the spout in a particular
15 position, namely, at the lowest possible point.

In light of the foregoing disadvantages, it would be a significant advancement in the art of liquid dispensing to provide a collapsible container for use in a bag-in-box package that would enable substantially complete withdrawal of the liquid from the
20 container without the use of an evacuation strip or slanted rack.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, this invention is directed to an improved collapsible bag having a spout and one or more grooves on the interior surface of a wall of the bag. The grooves, which are integral
25 to a wall of the bag rather than on a separate evacuation strip, are in liquid communication with the spout and are sized such that the opposing wall of the bag is not completely forced into the grooves under the suction of conventional pumps which are used to withdraw the liquid from the bag. Thus, the grooves enable
30 substantially complete withdrawal of the liquid from the bag

without the use of an evacuation strip. Additionally, the present invention may be used in any orientation and does not require a slanted rack. Although the primary intended application of the present invention is in bag-in-box packages for containing and dispensing beverages, this invention may also be used to advantage in other liquid dispensing applications.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

This invention may best be understood by reference to the following drawings:

10 Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a collapsible bag in accordance with the present invention disposed within a box.

Fig. 2 is a cut-away top view illustrating the interior of the bottom wall of the collapsible bag of Fig. 1.

15 Fig. 3 is a cut-away top view illustrating the interior of the bottom wall of an alternative embodiment of a collapsible bag in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a sectional view taken along line 4-4 of Fig. 2 or Fig. 3.

20 Fig. 5 is a cut-away top view illustrating the interior of the bottom wall of another alternative embodiment of a collapsible bag in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 6 is a top view of the collapsible bag of Fig. 1.

Fig. 7 is a top view of the collapsible bag of Fig. 5.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

25 Referring to Fig. 1, a preferred embodiment of this invention comprises a collapsible bag 10 having a spout 12 and a plurality of grooves 14 on the interior of the bottom wall of bag 10. Bag 10, which is useful for containing and dispensing a liquid such as a beverage (not shown), is adaptable for insertion into a box 20 to form

a bag-in-box apparatus. Spout 12 protrudes through a flap opening 22 of box 20. Figure 2 more clearly illustrates the interior of the bottom wall of bag 10 with grooves 14, which are in liquid communication with spout 12. As liquid is dispensed from spout 12, bag 10 gradually collapses. However, grooves 14 prevent the walls of bag 10 from sealing off the liquid from spout 12, which enables substantially complete evacuation of the liquid from bag 10. Collapsible bag 10 may be made of a pair of sheets of flexible material, such as a thermoplastic, polynylon, metallized plastic, or other suitable material, joined at the peripheries by means known in the art, such as heat sealing or a suitable adhesive. The flexible sheets form the walls of the bag 10. Spout 12 may be attached to a wall of bag 10 by similar means. Grooves 14 may be formed in a bag wall by a variety of manufacturing techniques, such as extrusion, molding, machining, stamping, or pressing. Although Figs. 1 and 2 show grooves 14 in the bottom bag wall, alternatively grooves 14 may be formed in the upper bag wall. Additionally, although Figs. 1 and 2 show spout 12 and grooves 14 disposed on the same bag wall, spout 12 and grooves 14 may be on opposite bag walls so long as grooves 14 are in liquid communication with spout 12 as bag 10 collapses. For the sake of clarity, Fig. 1 does not show stiffener 16 as illustrated in Fig. 6 and discussed below.

Figure 3 illustrates an alternative bag 110 having a grid-like pattern of grooves 114 on the interior of the bottom wall of bag 110. Grooves 114 are in liquid communication with spout 12 to allow substantially complete withdrawal of the liquid from bag 110. Figure 4 illustrates the cross-sectional view taken at line 4-4 of either Fig. 2 or Fig. 3. Grooves 114 may be in a variety of different patterns other than the pattern shown in Fig. 3. For example, a chevron groove pattern 214 feeding into a collection zone 216 in the

vicinity of spout 12 is shown on bag 210 in Fig. 5. Again, although Figs. 3 and 5 show grooves 114 and 214 in the bottom bag wall, grooves 114 and 214 may be formed in the upper bag wall, and spout 12 and grooves 114, 214 may be on opposite bag walls so long as grooves 114, 214 are in liquid communication with spout 12 as bag 110, 210 collapses.

As shown in Fig. 6, the top of bag 10 may be provided with a stiffener 16 to help guard against the complete collapse of the bag upon itself and the consequent trapping of residual liquid inside the bag. As bag 10 collapses upon withdrawal of the liquid, stiffener 16 will overlie at least one groove 14. The stiffness of stiffener 16 prevents it from being sucked into groove 14 and blocking the liquid from spout 12. Figure 7 illustrates a similar stiffener 218 on bag 210.

Although the foregoing specific details describe a preferred embodiment of this invention, persons reasonably skilled in the art of liquid dispensing will recognize that various changes may be made in the details of the apparatus of this invention without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims. Therefore, it should be understood that this invention is not to be limited to the specific details shown and described herein.

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A collapsible container for use in containing and dispensing a liquid, comprising:
 - 5 a flexible bag having a bag wall with an interior surface, said interior surface having at least one groove; and
 - a spout disposed through said bag wall for dispensing liquid from said bag;
- wherein said at least one groove is in liquid communication
10 with said spout as said bag collapses to permit substantially complete withdrawal of liquid from said bag.
2. The collapsible container of claim 1 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves having elongated portions oriented substantially parallel to each other.
- 15 3. The collapsible container of claim 1 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves interconnected in a grid-like pattern.
4. The collapsible container of claim 1 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves interconnected in a
20 chevron pattern.
5. The collapsible container of claim 1 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves that feed into a collection zone adjacent said spout.
6. The collapsible container of claim 1 wherein said
25 flexible bag further comprises a stiffener that overlies said at least one groove as said flexible bag collapses to help maintain liquid communication between said at least one groove and said spout.

7. A collapsible container for use in containing and dispensing a liquid, comprising:

a flexible bag having a first bag wall and a second bag wall, said first bag wall having an interior surface with at least one
5 groove; and

a spout disposed through said second bag wall for dispensing liquid from said bag;

wherein said at least one groove is in liquid communication with said spout as said bag collapses to permit substantially
10 complete withdrawal of liquid from said bag.

8. The collapsible container of claim 7 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves having elongated portions oriented substantially parallel to each other.

9. The collapsible container of claim 7 wherein said at
15 least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves interconnected in a grid-like pattern.

10. The collapsible container of claim 7 wherein said at least one groove comprises a plurality of grooves interconnected in a chevron pattern.

20 11. The collapsible container of claim 7 wherein said flexible bag further comprises a stiffener that overlies said at least one groove as said flexible bag collapses to help maintain liquid communication between said at least one groove and said spout.

25 12. The collapsible container of claim 11 wherein said stiffener is connected to said second bag wall.

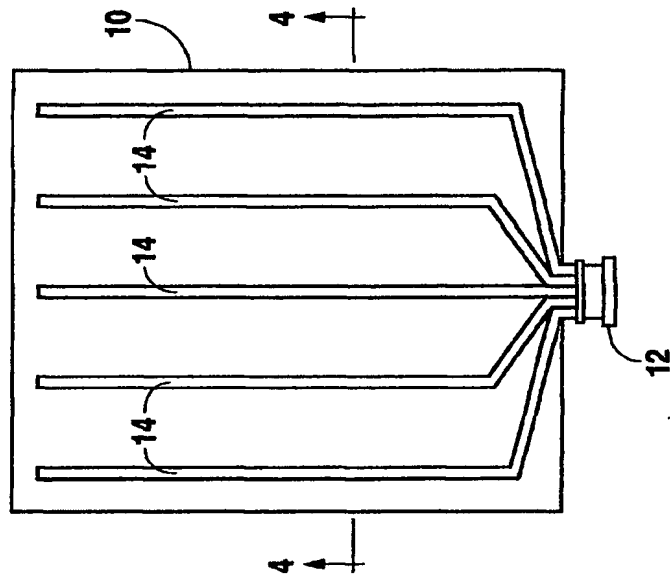


Fig. 2

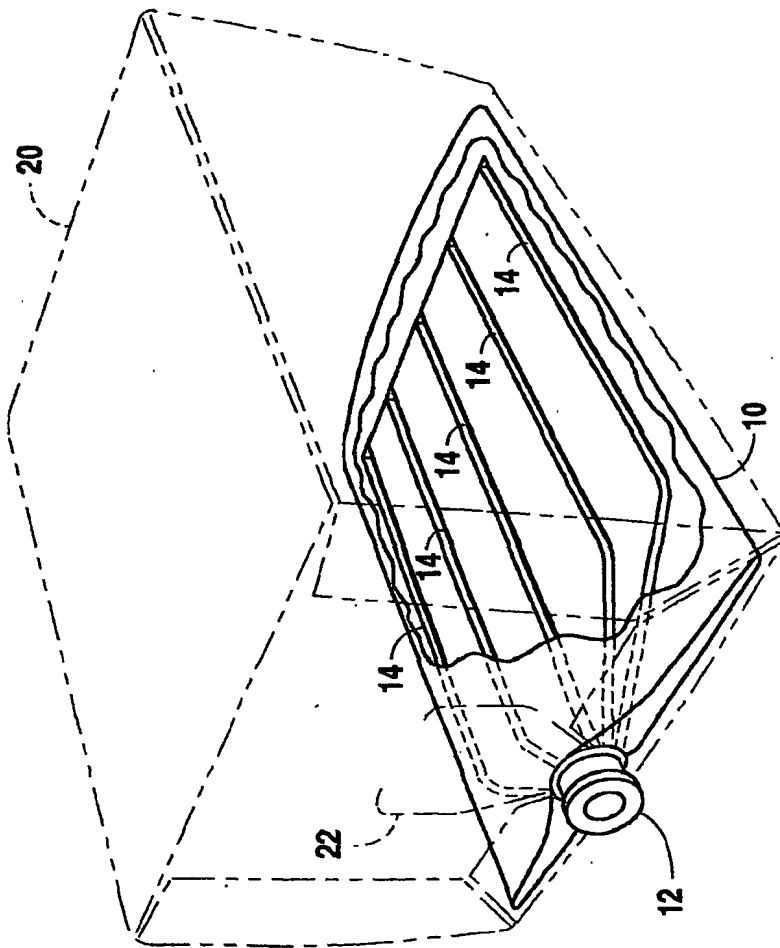


Fig. 1

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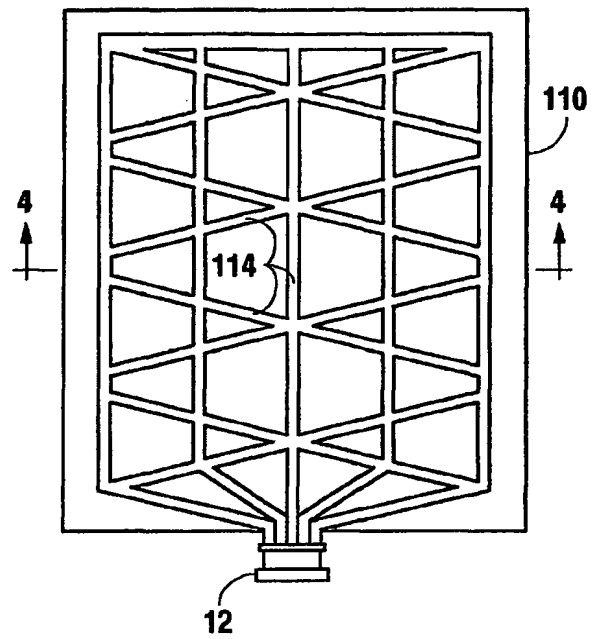


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

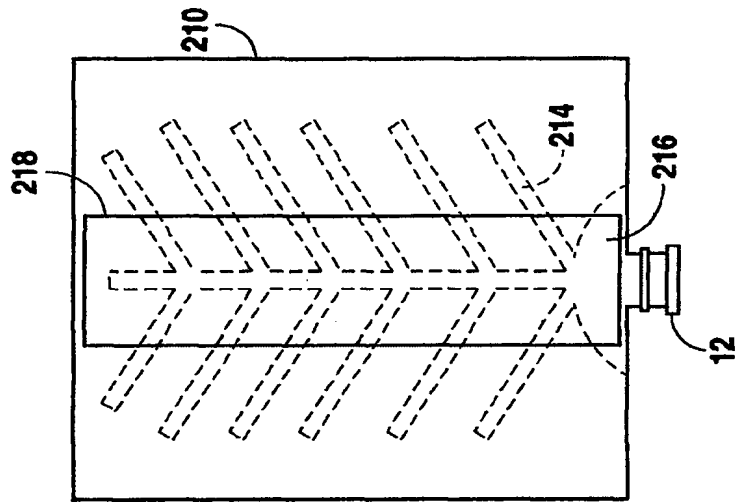


Fig. 7

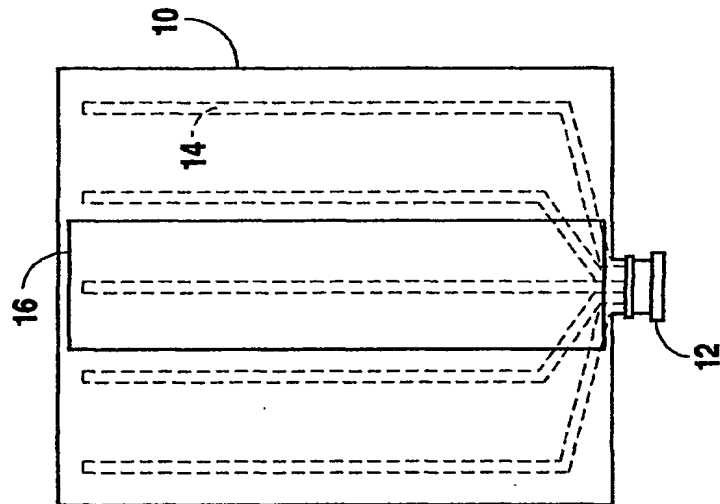


Fig. 6

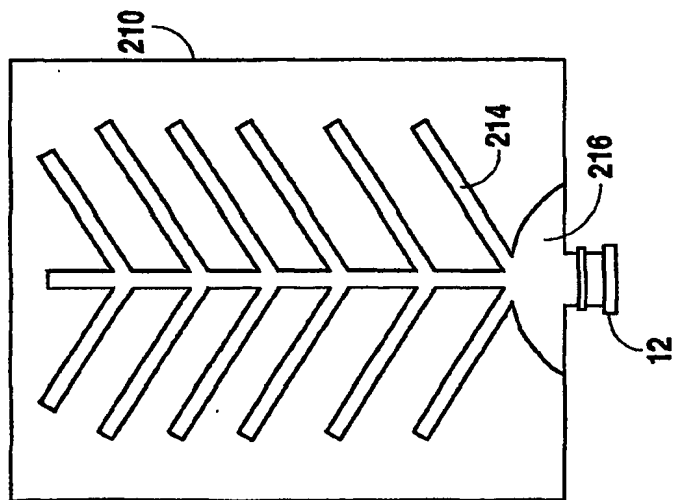


Fig. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/12203

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC(7) : B65D 35/56 US CL : 222/105 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) U.S. : 222/92 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,743,435 A (TOMIC) 28 April 1998 (28.04.1998), entire document, especially column 4, lines 27-62.	1-12
X	US 4,998,990 A (RICHTER et al) 12 March 1991 (12.03.1991), entire document, especially column 3, lines 12-42.	1-5, 7-10
—		6, 11-12
Y		6, 11-12
Y,P	US 6,105,821 A (CHRISTINE et al) 22 August 2000 (22.08.2000), column 3, lines 3-12.	6, 11-12
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
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"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E"	earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	
Date of the actual completion of the international search 02 July 2001 (02.07.2001)		Date of mailing of the international search report 01 AUG 2001
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703)305-3230		Authorized officer Kevin P. Shaver <i>Shane Smith Jr</i> Telephone No. 703-308-0861

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1998)